

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of Iraq
October 20, 2009

President Obama. Hello, everybody. Before I discuss the meeting that I've just had with Prime Minister Maliki, I just want to make a brief statement about Afghanistan.

I had the opportunity to speak with President Karzai this morning, and I wanted to congratulate him on accepting the certification of the recent election. As we all know, this has been a very difficult time in Afghanistan, to not only carry out a election under difficult circumstances, where there were a whole host of security issues that had to be resolved, but also postelection, a lot of uncertainty.

President Karzai, as well as the other candidates, I think have shown that they have the interest of the Afghan people at heart, that this is a reflection of a commitment to rule of law, and a insistence that the Afghan people's will should be done. And so I expressed the American people's appreciation for this step.

As I mentioned before, this has been a difficult election. You have violent forces opposed to democracy in Afghanistan. And yet despite these very difficult conditions, what we've seen is elections take place. We have now seen the IEC and the ECC in Afghanistan complete their work. We have seen the candidates expressing a willingness to abide by constitutional law, and there is a path forward in order to complete this election process.

I want to give particular thanks to Ambassador Karl Eikenberry and his team, who have been working tirelessly throughout this process. I also want to commend Senator John Kerry, who was in the region traveling and ended up working extensively with Ambassador Eikenberry and was extraordinarily constructive and very helpful. So I think he deserves great congratulations.

Moving forward, we will continue to work with our ISAF partners as well as the Afghan Government, however this election turns out, to ensure that we can move the Afghan—that we can move Afghanistan towards peace and security and prosperity and that the will of the Afghan people is ultimately done. So we are pleased with the steps that have been taken today, and we hope that we can build on this progress.

I finally want to thank the incredible work of our U.S. military and the young men and women who are stationed in Afghanistan who are doing so much to help bring about a more secure and prosperous and democratic Afghanistan.

I am grateful to have the opportunity to see Prime Minister Maliki once again. We had a wide-ranging discussion about the continuing progress that Iraq is making. We have seen in the last several months a consolidation of a commitment to democratic politics inside of Iraq. We are very interested, both of us, in making sure that Iraq has an election law that is completed on time so that elections can take place on time in January. That is consistent with the transition that has been taking place, and I reemphasized my commitment to Prime Minister Maliki that we will have our combat troops out of Iraq by August of next year and all of our troops out of Iraq by 2011.

But we didn't just talk about military and security issues. What is wonderful about this trip is that it represents a transition in our bilateral relationship, so that we are moving now to

issues beyond security and we are beginning to talk about economy, trade, commerce. The business and investment conference that's taking place is going to be very well attended. It includes not only Prime Minister Maliki but business leaders from both the United States and Iraq. We've seen over the last several months progress being made on providing clarification about investment laws inside of Iraq. There are, obviously, enormous opportunities for our countries to do business together.

And so I just want to congratulate Prime Minister Maliki on what I'm confident will be a successful conference and to reemphasize my administration's full support for all the steps that can be taken so that Iraq can not only be a secure place and a democratic country but also a place where people can do business, people can find work, families can make a living, and children are well-educated. And that broader sense of a U.S. relationship with a democratic Iraq is one that I think all of us are confident we can now achieve.

So thank you so much, Mr. Prime Minister, for your presence here today.

And I don't know if you—maybe we could translate the last part just about Iraq, as opposed to Afghanistan, just in case there's some—

[At this point, an Arabic translation of the President's remarks was provided to Prime Minister Maliki.]

Prime Minister Maliki. Thank you, Mr. President, and this opportunity to hold the business investment conference is a big economic demonstration and manifestation of the importance of this event that brings together more than 1,000 business entrepreneurs and a very distinguished, high-level Iraqi delegation.

I have also discussed with President Obama the various issues and the fact that our relations today have moved along and not only confined to the security cooperation but today have moved to the economic development and to providing prosperity for the Iraqi people.

We have discussed the issues of common interest to our bilateral relations under the—that are today framed under the strategic framework agreement and the various sectors, and all this is important for broader relation of our two nations.

We have also discussed the issue of the elections and the importance that these elections be held on time based on the national principles. We have also commented on the role of the United States that supports Iraq and the importance to end the international sanctions on Iraq and to remove Iraq from under chapter 7, because we don't have weapons of mass destructions anymore, and today, that we have put forth a lot of common sacrifices, and today, that there is a pluralistic political system in Iraq. This is important to move Iraq forward and to promote investments.

We will follow up on the outcome of the business investment conference in its various sectors because today, Iraq has moved beyond a dictatorship and beyond the destruction, and we are trying to rebuild all our sectors of agriculture, oil sectors, tourism, and so forth. We want to give the U.S. companies an opportunity to be present in investing in Iraq, and all this cooperation on the basis of the strategic framework agreement.

I thank you very much.

President Obama. Okay, thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:58 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan; and U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl W. Eikenberry. He also referred to the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission of Afghanistan. Prime Minister Maliki spoke in Arabic, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

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